



Scale: 1:550,819



Proposed Expansion for White River National Wildlife Refuge

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks to build on the great conservation work by our state, federal, conservation, and sportsmen partners. We are committed to passing on to future generations the chance to hike, paddle, hunt, fish, and otherwise enjoy this exceptional White River watershed.”

Dan Ashe
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The White River National Wildlife Refuge in east-central Arkansas is one of the largest remaining bottomland hardwood forests in the Mississippi River Valley. The refuge is a haven for native wildlife and migratory birds, and is home to the largest concentration of wintering mallard ducks in the Mississippi Flyway.

The refuge, with more than 90 miles of river frontage, lies in the floodplain of the White River, where it meets the Mississippi River and contains more than 300 lakes, interlaced with streams, sloughs and bayous.



Matt Conner/USFWS



Ann Carr/USFWS

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Proposed Expansion

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing to expand the White River National Wildlife Refuge to connect existing conservation lands, provide sustainable wildlife habitat and offer more public opportunities to hunt, fish and observe wildlife. The public benefits include improved water quality and flood protection.

If approved, the refuge would be authorized to purchase lands within the expanded boundary only **from willing sellers**, as funding allows.

The refuge, established in 1935 to protect ducks, geese and other migratory birds, currently covers approximately 160,756 acres. An additional 11,701 acres is part of the existing acquisition boundary, which is the area within which the Service is authorized to negotiate with willing sellers to purchase lands for the refuge.

The proposal would add another 125,349 acres to White River’s acquisition boundary in the area surrounding the refuge and south to the mouth of the Arkansas River at the Mississippi River. The expansion would incorporate the floodplain for nine additional river miles of the White River, about 26 river miles of the Arkansas River, and 34 river miles of the Mississippi River.

The proposed expansion includes undeveloped areas in Arkansas, Desha, Monroe and Phillips Counties in Arkansas, and Bolivar County in Mississippi. Ten state-owned wildlife management areas and four state-owned natural areas are located in the vicinity of the proposed expansion area.

The proposed expansion supports the goals and objectives of multiple conservation initiatives, including the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative, the Arkansas and Mississippi State Wildlife Action Plans and America’s Great Outdoors Initiative.

Earlier this year, the White River watershed was designated as the country’s second National Blueway by the U.S. Department of Interior, with support of more than 30 organizations including the State of Arkansas, local governments, businesses, and other partners. The watershed was chosen because of its national significance, as well as its recreational, economic, cultural and ecological assets.



Ron Hollis/USFWS



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Benefits

Expanding the acquisition boundary would provide multiple conservation benefits, including:

- Furthering the refuge’s mission to conserve, restore, and protect migratory birds and their habitats, resident wildlife species, and rare, threatened, and endangered species, such as the piping plover and ivory-billed woodpecker.
- Improve long-term watershed health and stability, offering flood protection for the human communities in the White, Arkansas and Mississippi River basins, and improved aquatic and wetland habitats for wildlife;
- Conserve the outdoor traditions of Arkansas and Mississippi by providing more opportunities to hunt, fish and bird watch, and to offer environmental education. About 1.3 million people participated in wildlife-dependent recreation in Arkansas in 2011, generating about \$1.8 billion in economic activity;
- Strategically focus federal, state and local conservation efforts in a high-value watershed;

- Conserve and restore bottomland hardwood forests, important to waterfowl, neotropical birds, white-tailed deer, and many other native wildlife species;
- Connect a wildlife corridor from the Ozark foothills to the Mississippi River for wide-ranging species such as the American black bear;
- Join vital components of Arkansas’ “Big Woods;”
- Increase the productivity of commercially-managed forest lands for wildlife habitat by applying wildlife forestry practices often referred to as "Desired Forest Conditions," similar to ongoing forest management on existing refuge lands. Any forested lands acquired in the expansion area will be incorporated in the Refuge's Forest Management Plan.

Wildlife Potential

This proposal will provide additional habitat for a diversity of wildlife in the White River basin, including migratory and nesting waterfowl, Swallow tailed kite, shorebirds, colonial wading and water birds, and forest breeding and Neotropical migratory birds. Resident birds and mammals such as Eastern wild turkey, white-tailed deer, bats, American



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black bear, numerous furbearers, and small mammals also will be benefitted. Additionally, this proposal will enhance conditions for numerous species of reptiles, amphibians, mussels and fish that inhabit the rivers, bayous, creeks, lakes, and other wetland areas.

How would the expansion be funded?

If approved, the Service would draw funding for land acquisition primarily from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. These funds are not derived from traditional tax revenues, but are collected from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps, entrance fees from certain National Wildlife Refuges, and import duties on arms and ammunition (Migratory Bird Conservation Fund), and from the sale of offshore oil leases (Land and Water Conservation Fund). Funding from these sources is intended to aid in the conservation of land across the nation.

How would local tax revenues be impacted?

The federal government does not pay property tax on its lands. However, the Service annually reimburses counties to compensate for lost revenue, based on a formula that’s the greater of: 75 cents per acre; three-fourths of one percent of the fair market value; or 25 percent of

the net receipts collected from operation and management of the refuge. Congress may also appropriate additional funds to compensate local governments.

What is the timeline for this proposal?

This is a long-term initiative that would take many decades to complete. The timeline would be determined by the number of willing sellers that wish to sell their land to become part of the refuge, and the amount of funding the refuge receives to buy land.

The Service will buy land **from willing sellers only**. Conservation easements will also be considered as a part of the conservation approach if desired by the landowner.

Partners

This partnership planning effort includes:

- Area landowners
- Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
- Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

- The Nature Conservancy
- The National Wildlife Refuge Association
- The Conservation Fund

Proposed Schedule

August 2012 - May 2013: Preliminary information-gathering meetings with government agencies and public officials and key partners within the proposed expansion area.

May 2013 - June 2013: Public scoping period, including three public meetings.

July 2013: Develop Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment for Public review and comment.

August 2013: Public comment period, including public meeting.

September - October 2013: Develop final Land Protection Plan and

Environmental Assessment along with associated NEPA documentation.

Winter 2013-14: Decision by the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

For More Information

Please visit our web page at: <http://www.fws.gov/whiteriver/expansion>

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